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IF IT MOVES, SHOOT IT

by Emily S. Jones
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Among the multitude of terms for different types of motion pictures, there is one which has a particularly mysterious sound. To call a film "iconographic" is to burden it with a label which may frighten off its rightful audience, but it is difficult to find a better word for the motion pictures made from still material, where the only actual motion is that of the camera. The technique has been used frequently in recent years—sometimes to produce something that is little more than a filmstrip with a soundtrack, and sometimes to make such outstanding films as "1848" and IMAGES MEDIEVALES: Properly used, the iconographic technique, in spite of its ponderous name, can result in lively films that deserve to be called motion pictures.

One of the major producers of iconographic films is Weston Woods Studios. For the past three years, Morton Schindel of Weston Woods has been busy turning the best of contemporary American picture books into children's films. MILLIONS OF CATS, HERCULES, GEORGIE, THE STORY ABOUT PING and most recently, LENTIL, are some of the well-loved books which have been transferred bodily to the screen. Only the actual illustrations from the book are used, as a narrator reads the original text. There is no animation of the Disney or UPA variety, but the camera explores the pictures to bring every detail clearly to the viewer. Sometimes there is an illustration of motion, but chiefly the effect is that of looking over the storyteller's shoulder. The question has been raised to whether this is a proper use for the motion picture medium. Has anything been gained by putting the book on film? Would it be better for a library to buy one print of MAKE WAY FOR DUCKLINGS or fifty copies of it and other picture books for the constantly depleted supply in the children's room? And is the child better off seeing the pictures on the screen, or turning the pages himself? Fortunately, it does not have to be an either-or proposition. Children, particularly small children, love to hear the same story over and over again. If they see PING on television, or at the library, they will ask for the book and take new pleasure in greeting old friends. In schools, the films can encourage children to read for themselves the stories they have seen. And if the films can show a first-grader that there are other things besides the "John has a ball—Mary has a ball—See the ball" regamarole, they will have justified their existence a hundred times over.

The art film is, by the nature of its subject, almost always a motion picture record of still material, and falls into the iconographic niche. Many art films provide a substitute for a visit to an exhibit of paintings, and as such have their place, but they contribute nothing as films. Others use the same basic material to tell the story of a man or a movement or an era in a way that could not be duplicated in any other medium. An outstanding example is the recent PAINTING AN AMERICA, a color film distributed, both sales and rental, by Film Images. It is based on the collection of early American painting in the Detroit Institute of Art, covering the the eighteenth century and the first years of the nineteenth. The portraits of merchants, patriots, and dignitaries by Copley, Dunlap, Trumball, Gilbert Stuart, and Charles Willson Peale; the story telling paintings of Rembrandt, Peale, and Washington Allston; and the views of American scenery and wildlife by Doughty and Audubon have considerable interest both as art and as Americana. But Film-makers have done more than put an art show on film—they have used the paints to show one aspect of our history, the change of emphasis from European-centered formality of the mid-eighteenth century, to the rise of pride in the young replublic's own heroes and consciousness of its own destiny, to the turn towards the fascination of the wilderness and the way west. The narration includes quotations from the artists and critics of the period, and the musical background is provided by appropriate folk song sung to a guitar accompaniment. Art and history together produced a fine film.

Canada, too, takes deep interest in its own history, and the National Film Board of Canada has just released a segment of history on film which is none the less colorful because it was shot in black and white. CITY OF GOLD is the story of the fabulous days of the Gold Rush in Dawson City in 1898. In a framework of motion picture scenes of the town as it is today, a man who grew up there recalls his own childhood playing among the ghost-town relics. Then he goes further back, and through still photographs of the Gold Rush period, he relates the history of the stampede of prospectors, the city that sprang up overnight, and its one brief summer of prosperity and fame. The photographs have been used with amazing skill until it seems as though a documentary cameraman must have been on hand. The faces of the hopeful prospectors, hard working miners, bartenders gamblers, dance hall girls (no resemblance whatever to Marlene Dietrich), and the law-enforcing Mounties come out of the past with a poignancy that no Hollywood movie on the subject has ever touched. Its general appeal has not gone unrecognized—it will have theatrical release before it becomes available on 16mm next fall.

A motion picture must move—that is an obvious stipulation. But motion is more than meaningless action; it must have direction and purpose. When still pictures come alive under the camera, the result can be a moving film.

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DATES TO REMEMBER

April 13 — 19 Chamber of Commerce Week
April 27 — May 3 Mental Health Week

REPORT FROM THE CONFERENCE ON FILMS

One hundred and seventy-five delegates from Ontario and Quebec came to Toronto for the Conference on Films which was held on January 22nd and 23rd.

The delegates represented the interests of Film Sponsors, Film Producers, educationists and film users in general and heard addresses by Glen Burch of the Ford Foundation Fund for Adult Education and Erik Barnouw, Director of The Centre for Mass Communication, Columbia University.

Those attending the Conference also took part in group discussions on "The Film In Canada – 1958" and a symposium on "What's Wrong With Our Films?"

Here are some of the recommendations and conclusions from the group discussions:

The Film

It was agreed at the Conference that too many Canadian films just fall short of being really worthy achievements. Fifteen to twenty per cent more planning, it was felt, would raise many Canadian films from mediocrity to true effectiveness.

A common fault was the making of 'multipurpose' films. Both producers and sponsors should be reminded that a film should be kept as unified as possible. Too much advertising defeats a film's purpose.

It was also agreed that producers should never forget that the peculiar devices of the film are those devices which appeal subtly and effectively to the emotions.

Teaching films, it was suggested, should be produced with the purpose of teaching in mind.

There is a great need for films in certain subject areas. A film should be made, aimed specifically at helping the new immigrant to understand Canada. A separate film entirely should be made to help Canadians break down their prejudices toward newcomers. It was also suggested that the Canada Council should make a grant to the N.F.B. for the production of one historical film per year.

It was agreed that there should be more films on problems themselves rather than on localized examples of problems. Another suggestion was that typewritten summaries should be placed on the inside of the can of each print of a film and that discussion trailers be placed on teaching films.

Film Users

The importance of proper film use was stressed and it was agreed that films should not be adapted to suit purposes for which they were not intended. There is still a great need of the user being educated in the discriminating use of films.

A discriminating viewer will recognize an effective film and gain more from it, at the same time keeping his perspective on the subject being dealt with. Teachers should be taught the proper use of films so that they may select and use films effectively in their schools.

Difficulties in film procurement, and time involved in previewing, militate against the ready accessibility of films. Some public librairies operate a flourishing film section, others do not. It was recommended that a means be sought to expand library film services to include more films than they do at present.

Film Sponsors

A private producer in Canada cannot make a film with any hope of profitable distribution without a sponsor.

A film Sponsor's organization should be set up and sponsored films should be used more on television. It was also suggested that sponsors should make trailers of clips from their films for addition to film programs.

Film Information & Research

The need for film evaluations and their distribution was stressed in group discussions as was, also, the need for a study on what makes a stimulating film. The Federal Department of Agriculture, for example, wanted to know if its report to the public in HONEY BEES & POLLINATION was as effective as it might be.

It was also agreed that there was a need for research on audience reaction, fields of interest, subject material for producers and sponsors, as well as information and data on the film medium and consultative services for producers and sponsors looking for new ideas.

It was agreed that a central film index should be established at the Canadian Film Institute.

Finally, it was recommended that all groups represented at the Conference should be members of Canadian Film Institute and that CFI plan more of these conferences in Toronto, Montreal and elsewhere. To do this it was suggested that a standing committee be set up and also that this committee should encourage the formation of small groups in various localities for the consideration of subjects raised at this and future conferences.

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Films For Children

In the article Personally Speaking, printed in this Bulletin, Emily Jones discusses the iconographic films produced by Weston Woods Studios. These films are known as the "Picture Book Parade" series, and are distributed in Canada by Canadian Film Institute. They are intended primarily to increase a child's desire to read and are useful in public libraries, elementary teaching, teacher training and adult groups interested in children. They are interesting to adults as well as to children. The films are based on outstanding children's books and the titles of those produces so far are....ANDY AND THE LION, STCNE SOUP, THE STORY AB CUT PING, HERCULES, THE RED CARPET, MILLIONS OF CATS, MAKE WAY FOR DUCKLINGS, GEORGIE, THE LITTLE RED LIGHTHOUSE, MIKE MULLIGAN & HIS STEAMSHOVEL, JENNY'S BIRTHDAY, CIRCUS BABY, LENTIL and THE CAMEL WHO TOOK A WALK The prices for purchase of these films begins as low as $25, and for rental—$2.00. Information regarding preview, purchase and rental may be obtained by writing CFI. Utilization guides for use in elementary schools, libraries, teacher training and community groups are available on request.

Last month Weston Woods Studios released the first eight filmstrips in the "Picture Book Parade" series and these are also available for purchase. The prices begin at $4.00 and go to $6.50 each. However, if the complete set of eight are purchased the price is only $42. A complete set of filmstrips comes in a convenient storage box with text booklets. The titles of the filmstrips now available are....GEORGIE, MILLIONS OF CATS, HERCULES, THE RED CARPET, MAKE WAY FOR DUCKLINGS, STONE SOUP, MIKE MULLIGAN & HIS STEAMSHOVEL and THE STORY ABOUT PING.

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VANCOUVER FESTIVAL RECEIVES INTERNATIONAL APPROVAL

The Vancouver Festival has been approved by the International Federation of Film Producers Associations and with this approval ranks with the outstanding film festivals of the world.

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